

TALES FROM JOZI

Johannesburg, lovingly known as Jo'burg or Jozi, is South Africa's most paradoxical city. It has everything it takes to become a world metropolis. But Jürgen Schadeberg warns in his picture series 'Tales from Jozi', "it is precisely this contradictory reality that poses the biggest threat for the city's black population."

PHOTOS: JÜRGEN SCHADEBERG





Daily life in what used to be an elegant block of flats. Busiswe (left) will have to explain to her sister that she can no longer pay her schooling

Bhekinkosi (below right) and his daughter in front of their house. A shot in the leg during a street party gone wrong has made him unable to work





In Yeoville it's colourful, flashy, dull, quiet. The heart of Africa beats in Johannesburg's multi-cultural neighbourhoods



Street vendors' defiant optimism adds a colourful touch to Schadeberg's snapshots. Not far away, black high society dance the night away



PORTFOLIO
JÜRGEN SCHADEBERG

Mandla, Sifiso and their friends get by on odd jobs. When there's no work around, they sit in the shade and chat. The stairway is their playground, the back yard their laundry



Right: Thabisile earns a meagre wage working for a security company. She's happy to have work



Quiet nights in Jozi. In many areas it's better not to go out on the streets



Jürgen Schadeberg and Jozi first met in 1950. The economy was booming and the city was in a period of massive transformation. Enormous skyscrapers and shopping centres sprang up over night, and thousands of neon lights gave the American-like expansion a cool glow. The photographer's work was strongly influenced by both the apartheid regime and South Africa's fight for its own identity. Schadeberg left the country in the early sixties to work in Europe and the States. And what happened to Jozi? Unnoticed, the city changed its American outfit for an African one. Black people moved into areas that were previously exclusively white. After widespread disturbances in the mid seventies, tentative reforms were introduced by the South African government.

When Schadeberg and his wife Claudia returned to South Africa in 1985, they produced and directed a film documentary on culture and politics, and found themselves along with Jozi right in the middle of apartheid's demise. From surrounding townships, thousands of hopeful migrants descended on the city, moving into derelict apartment buildings long abandoned by whites. Reviving the city centre remains one of the current government's biggest challenges. Schadeberg explains, "Over 300 blocks of flats are being occupied by families who are often unemployed. There's a department at the university that defends these people in court. The state wants to throw them out, but offers no alternatives. The department assigned me to take pictures they could take to court with them. Then it occurred to me that it would make a good book."

"Tales from Jozi" grew out of that original idea. In the process, Schadeberg discovered the city's many facets, from decadent upper class fashion shows, to neighbourhoods where absolute poverty reigns. His work is defined throughout by authenticity, calm, and fairness. Sometimes he focuses his camera on individual stories; in other moments, individuals seem to disappear amid glamour and garbage. The picture book also gives native artists and authors an opportunity to express themselves. One of them writes, "Our city greets many of its inhabitants with blatant nastiness. The time has come to remember what Africa can do best: laugh. Then Jozi will be able to embrace its people."

"Tales from Jozi" is much more than a documentary record. It is a balanced discussion between the photographer and his city, an aesthetic play of questions and answers, a two sided declaration of love between an elderly married couple, who know and acknowledge each other with a passion and respect based on the memories of many turbulent years together. MAIKE BÖHM

Tales from Jozi. Photographs by Jurgen Schadeberg: 160 pages, 27x27 cm, fully four colours, Protea Boekhuis, Menlopark, South Africa, 2007